

## SOME REMINISCENCES OF FIFTY YEARS' PSYCHICAL RESEARCH.<sup>1</sup>

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"Science is bound by the everlasting law of honour to face fearlessly every problem that can fairly be presented to it."—LORD KELVIN.

JUST fifty years ago this month I first began a serious and systematic investigation of psychical phenomena, and was so impressed with the supreme importance of the subject that so far as my time and strength permitted I have continued the investigation to the present time with unabated interest. Of course, other and far abler men both preceded me and worked contemporaneously with me; to some of these I will refer directly.

### EARLY PSYCHICAL RESEARCHERS.

By psychical research I mean the critical investigation, and, where possible, the verification of alleged supernormal phenomena, or of hitherto unrecognised human faculties.

So far as regards narratives of spiritistic phenomena, these of course go back to remote ages, and records are to be found in many different countries. Years ago Andrew Lang had several conversations with me on the value of the S.P.R. devoting some time to historical research on this subject, for he attached great importance to the fact of the wide diffusion, both in space and time, of phenomena similar to those we are now engaged in investigating.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Read at a Private Meeting of the Society on June 17, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> The laborious and admirable work by William Howitt, entitled *History of the Supernatural*, is well known and should be consulted by all who are interested in the history of psychical research. It made a great impression on me when I read it some fifty years ago. The term *supernatural* should, however, have been *supernormal*, as all phenomena—however novel and inexplicable they may appear to be—are really *natural*; only God is above and beyond Nature.

Biblical references show that Spiritualism was rampant in the early history of the Jews; King Saul himself being a notable spiritualist, consulting his medium at Endor. As I have said elsewhere, before science had established a universal reign of law or of the great world order, the pursuit of these spiritistic phenomena was justly condemned by the ancient prophets as likely to lead to intellectual and moral confusion. It seems probable, however, that many of the prophetic writings were done automatically, as in the book of *Chronicles* David says that the instructions he gave regarding the building of the Temple were not his own ideas, for "the Lord made me understand in writing *by his hand upon me.*"<sup>1</sup>

One of the first psychical researchers of whom I can find any report was the learned and famous German Jesuit, Fr. A. Kircher. In his *Latin folios*, published in 1640, he discusses the cause of the motion of the 'pendule explorateur' (a little ball or ring suspended by a string held by one hand) and of the forked divining rod, both of which at that time were the subject of acute controversy. Kircher showed that if the 'pendule' or the rod were held, not by the hand, but by a rigid support, no motion occurs under any circumstances. He was thus led to discover the principle of unconscious muscular action, a discovery claimed two centuries later by the distinguished French chemist, Chevreul, and by Dr. W. B. Carpenter subsequently.

Some twenty years after Kircher's work appeared, one of the founders of the Royal Society, the Hon. Robert Boyle, 'the son of the Earl of Cork and the Father of Chemistry,' in his *Philosophical Works* discusses the question of the divining rod, and urges further experiments to test its value in the discovery of mineral veins, for the evidence he collected was conflicting. He remarks that eye-witnesses, who were far from credulous, told him of the great value of the rod, and one gentleman in whose hand it moved when he passed over a vein of ore, affirmed "that the motion of his hand did not at all contribute to the inclination of the rod, but that sometimes when

<sup>1</sup> See 1 *Chron.* xxviii. 19.

he held it very fast it would bend so strongly as to break in his hand.”<sup>1</sup>

In one of the first volumes of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* Boyle asks the question whether anyone could inform him “whether diggers do meet with the subterraneous demons which are said to inhabit the lead mines of Somersetshire, and in what shape and manner they appear?” In a subsequent number the famous Dr. Glanvil, also a Fellow of the Royal Society, replied that he lived near the lead mines in the Mendips, and that whilst the miners heard the knockings of the demons, and by following the directions of these knockings were led to plenty of ore, nevertheless he had not found anyone who had actually *seen* the demons or gnomes themselves, and therefore he could not describe their appearance or habits.<sup>2</sup> A curious fact is that these knockings are heard and the gnomes believed in by lead miners in various parts of England and Ireland. The simple scientific explanation of these sounds I think I have discovered, but it would take me too far to go into the matter here. The point I want to bring out is that Boyle and Glanvil and many of the early Fellows of the Royal Society were true psychical researchers; as Prof. de Morgan has said, “they set themselves to work to prove all things, that they might hold fast to that which was good; they bent themselves to the question whether sprats were young herrings and whether a spider could crawl through the powder of a unicorn’s horn.” They enquired whether there was any value in magnetical cures and any good in Kenelm Digby’s sympathetic powder. Even a century later the great Sir Isaac Newton describes in a series of letters—which I have seen, as they have been preserved by my friend, Mr. Blayny Balfour—how he spent much time and money in testing the value of certain alchemical powders which were said to turn lead into gold.

The early spiritualists really took the method of these pioneers of physical science. Though they might have

<sup>1</sup> Boyle’s *Philosophical Works* (1738), vol. i., p. 172 and 173.

<sup>2</sup> *Phil. Trans.*, No. 19, Nov. 1666; and Glanvil’s reply is in *Phil. Trans.*, vol. iii., 1668.

been frequently too credulous, yet what they aimed at was to collect facts however improbable they appeared to be, and as De Morgan says, "The spiritualists beyond a doubt are in the track that has led to all advancement in physical science; they have the spirit and the method of the grand time when paths had to be cut through the uncleared forests in which it is now the daily routine to walk. Their spirit was that of universal examination, wholly unchecked by fear of being discovered in the investigation of nonsense."<sup>1</sup>

One of the earliest Fellows of the Royal Society, to whom I have already referred, was Dr. Joseph Glanvil; he was chaplain to Charles II. and a prebendary of Worcester. The historian Lecky describes him as "a man of incomparable ability." Speaking of one of Glanvil's works, Lecky remarks, "it would be difficult to find a work displaying less of credulity and superstition than this treatise." Glanvil's *Saducismus Triumphatus*, published at the end of the seventeenth century, discusses the evidence concerning witches and apparitions, and gives the fullest report of those remarkable poltergeist phenomena known as the 'Demon of Tedworth' or the "Disturbances in Mr. Mompesson's house in Wiltshire." Glanvil truly remarks that "matters of fact well proved ought not to be denied because we cannot conceive how they could be performed. Deceit and fallacy will only warrant a greater care and caution in examining." Glanvil had the warm support not only of Robert Boyle, but also of the famous Henry More.

In his record of the hauntings of the Epworth parsonage in 1716, and in his endeavour to get first-hand evidence of other supernormal phenomena, John Wesley—as Mr. J. Arthur Hill has said—"would have made an excellent member of the S.P.R.," and it is certainly surprising—as Mr. Hill adds—"to find in an earnestly religious man of that day, such as John Wesley, so much critical interest in our subject."

Coming to more recent times, the memoir of the eleventh Duke of Somerset, the great grandfather of our friend and

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *From Matter to Spirit*, pp. 18-20.

fellow-worker, Miss Ramsden, shows that the Duke was really a keen psychical researcher, for he critically examined several psychic cases, among others the well-known dream of a Cornish farmer, Williams, who on May 11, 1812, woke his wife and told her that he had dreamt he had seen a man shot in the lobby of the House of Commons, and described his appearance, etc. The dream was repeated, and told to several people; subsequently it was found that the details of the dream exactly corresponded with the facts connected with the assassination of Mr. Percival, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on the eleventh May, the very evening Williams had his dream.<sup>1</sup> Percival's descendant—my venerable friend, Miss Percival of Chobham—has also given me a written contemporary record of this remarkable dream.

Among the Fellows of the Royal Society who warmly advocated the investigation of psychical phenomena, was Dr. Mayo, F.R.S., Professor of Physiology in King's College, London, whose writings on the subject, published about the middle of the last century, are well worth perusal, containing as they do many new and interesting facts, which at the present day seem little known.

This period was also notable for the great interest excited by mesmeric phenomena. The remarkable report of the committee appointed by the medical section of the French Academy of Sciences on this subject, together with the amazing phenomena to which they testify, excited widespread interest. Eminent English physicians and surgeons, such as Dr. Elliotson of St. Thomas' Hospital and Dr. Esdaile, presidency surgeon in Calcutta, made numerous contributions to our knowledge on this subject, especially as regards the therapeutic and analgesic power of mesmerism. Esdaile, as is well known, conducted a very large number of *major* surgical operations, absolutely painlessly, under the mesmeric trance; and if the use of chloroform as an anaesthetic had not been discovered about this time, the value of mesmeric trance in surgical operations would have been universally acknowledged. But

<sup>1</sup> See p. 335 in Lady Gwendolen Ramsden's *Correspondence of Two Brothers from 1809-1819* (Longmans & Co.).

in spite of the eminence of Dr. Elliotson and others, mesmerism was nevertheless denounced by the profession as a whole, and the *Lancet* called it "an odious fraud." It was not until Braid of Manchester employed the word *hypnotism* instead of mesmerism—and thus dissociated the subject from Mesmer, who was more or less of a quack—that the medical profession began to treat the subject with less contempt. Braid also gave a reasonable explanation of the phenomena, but subsequently this proved to be inadequate to account for all the facts. The valuable experimental work of the continental hypnotists, and of our own members, Edmund Gurney, Dr. Lloyd Tuckey and Dr. Milne Bramwell, have now placed hypnotic treatment among the recognised therapeutic agencies of the medical profession.

#### FOUNDATION OF THE SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH.

Some twenty-five years before our Society was founded a few of the younger Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, chief of whom was Mr. B. F. Westcott—afterwards the famous Bishop of Durham—started a 'Ghost Society' very much on the lines of our S.P.R. In our *Journal* for April last year I gave the object and the brief history of this Society, which included among its members several Cambridge graduates who subsequently became eminent, such as Archbishop Benson, Prof. Henry Sidgwick, and others. I will hand over for preservation among the archives of our Society the original document of the 'Cambridge Ghost Club' (as it was called), given to me by my friend the Archdeacon of Dublin.

As regards the foundation of our own Society, I have corrected elsewhere the misunderstanding which Prof. Richet and others have fallen into;<sup>1</sup> and also I wrote, by request, a fuller account of the early history of our Society.<sup>2</sup> Though it is true I happened to be the chief instrument in the foundation of our Society in 1882—and of kindred societies in Canada and the United States in

<sup>1</sup> See *Journal of the S.P.R.*, vol. xxi., October 1923, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> See *Light*, June 21, 1924.

1884—yet the high position and respect the S.P.R. has won is chiefly due to Sidgwick, Myers, and Gurney, the three great pillars upon which the edifice of our Society was originally built. These eminent men were unlike in many ways: Sidgwick by his adhesion to the S.P.R. greatly impressed the academic world, for his influence, wisdom, and caution were widely recognised; Myers by his enthusiasm, brilliant talents, and profound intuition, was the corner stone of the S.P.R. till his death in 1901: Gurney with his industry and immense range of knowledge was essential to the early progress and stability of our Society.

Crookes was really the first scientific man to devote his experimental skill, from 1870 to 1874, to the critical investigation of the physical phenomena of spiritualism. It is pitiful to think of the scientific ostracism to which he was subjected and over which his genius eventually triumphed. I am not, however, surprised at the Royal Society refusing to publish his spiritistic investigations, for, a few years later, my modest paper read before the British Association in 1876 was refused publication by scientific societies, of which I was member, on the very natural ground that science dealt with the evidence furnished by our recognised senses, whereas my paper dealt either with phenomena which transcended the usual channels of sense or with phenomena that transcended the material world.

#### EARLY STEPS IN PSYCHICAL RESEARCH.

Many friends have asked me how I first became interested in psychical research. Perhaps I may be forgiven for relating an old story. Between the years 1862 and 1867 I was assistant to Professor Tyndall at the Royal Institution. The atmosphere surrounding my early years there was entirely opposed to any belief in psychical phenomena. Faraday, to whom electrical engineers owe the source of all their vast undertakings—yet who lived and died a poor man—Faraday I saw almost daily, before he left the Royal Institution and went to live at the Hampton

Court Cottage given to him by the Prince Consort. I can never forget the debt I owe that famous man for his generous kindness and guidance to a young ignoramus like myself. Faraday had published about 1855 his famous experiment on table-turning, showing how unconscious muscular effort accounted for what *he* saw. A little later he publicly declined to sit with the medium Home, saying he had lost too much time over such matters already. Tyndall also had denounced spiritualism as an imposture. Both Huxley and Herbert Spencer were frequent visitors to the Royal Institution laboratory, and both of these eminent men treated all psychical phenomena with contemptuous indifference. Among other frequent visitors was an Irishman, Mr. John Wilson, who invited me to spend my vacations at his place in County Westmeath. For a couple of years I did so, and found to my astonishment that Mr. Wilson was a firm believer in—and experienced investigator of—mesmerism, as it was then called. He showed me some most extraordinary experiments upon a sensitive subject from his estate. I was naturally incredulous and asked to be allowed to repeat the experiments myself, selecting another subject. We found a young uneducated Irish girl, who proved to be extremely sensitive. In the mesmeric trance—in spite of every precaution that I took to prevent deception—whatever sensations I felt, whether of touch, taste or smell, were transferred to the subject, and, moreover, ideas and words which I thought of were reproduced more or less accurately by the hypnotised subject. A brief account of some of these experiments may be found in the first volume of our *Proceedings*, p. 240.

When I returned to London I repeated these experiments with a couple of boys whom I found susceptible to hypnosis. These experiments revealed to me the extraordinary power of either verbal or silent suggestion upon the hypnotised subject. For instance, placing a pair of shoes upon the table, I told one of the lads that I was going to float round the room and pointed to the position I was supposed to have reached near the ceiling. Then, clapping my hands, I suggested that I was safely back in



my shoes on the table. The boy stared at me with incredulity and related afterwards, both to me and to others, that he had really seen me floating round the room. A similar result was obtained by me with another subject when I was on a visit to America in 1884. Hence I was led to believe that spiritualistic phenomena, when not fraudulent, were really due to the *hallucination* of the observer; that, in fact, the phenomena, such as Home floating out of the room or putting his hands into the fire, were really *subjective* and not objective. I had been in correspondence with Mr. Crookes on scientific matters so far back as the year 1864, when I published in the *Philosophical Magazine* my first scientific research. In 1870 Crookes began his experiments with the famous medium D. D. Home; soon after this he wrote to me (in a letter which I have kept) as follows:

“ May 14, 1871.

DEAR MR. BARRETT,

I must have some conversation with you respecting these obscure phenomena. If you can help me to form anything like a physical theory I should be delighted. At present all I am quite certain about is that they are *objectively* true. I have had all my wits about me when at a seance, and the only person who appeared to be in a state of semi-consciousness is the medium himself. The other evening I saw Home handling red-hot coals as if they had been oranges. Will you favour me with a visit one evening when you are disengaged.

Very truly yours,

WILLIAM CROOKES.”

I had several interviews with Crookes, but unfortunately had no opportunity of any sitting with Home, and a year or two later I was appointed to the Chair of Physics at the Royal College of Science, Dublin. In 1874 I made my first acquaintance with the physical phenomena of spiritualism, and was able to put to the test my pre-conceived theory of hallucination, which was gradually dispelled, and I became convinced of the *objective* reality

of the phenomena. It so happened that one of the London weekly reviews had sent me about this time a number of books on spiritualism to review, and in a lengthy review I suggested the hallucination hypothesis, but in a postscript added that this view was open to serious doubt.

The record of my experiments in Ireland on the physical phenomena of spiritualism was read before the S.P.R., and will be found in our *Proceedings*, vol. iv., p. 25, etc. I was singularly fortunate in these early experiments on physical phenomena, as the mediums were personal friends, and the experiments took place in *full light* either in my own house or in that of my friends. After this lapse of time I think I may mention without indiscretion that the name of the young medium I called Florrie was Miss Clark; her father, a leading London solicitor, had taken a furnished house near my residence in Kingstown. The house belonged to Mr. James Wilson (brother of my Westmeath friend), who asked me to call on Mr. Clark. Mr. Wilson was the father of the late Commander-in-Chief, Sir Henry Wilson, an old student of mine. My prolonged investigation of Florrie Clark, in *full daylight*, and other experiments with the family of the Lauders (one of the leading photographers in Dublin), so impressed me with the supreme importance of the whole subject that I determined to let no opportunity pass of pursuing these investigations. Shortly afterwards I prepared a paper on the various psychical phenomena I had witnessed; this was accepted by and read before the British Association in 1876.<sup>1</sup>

Verbatim reports of my paper were given both in the local and the spiritualist journals of Sept. 1876.<sup>2</sup> It will be seen from the reports of this paper that, while some notable scientific men such as Dr. W. B. Carpenter vigorously opposed my paper, others still more notable spoke in my support; such, for example, as Mr. (afterwards Sir William) Crookes and the late Lord Rayleigh (both of whom

<sup>1</sup> The greater part of this paper (which the British Association refused to publish) will be found in *Proceedings of the S.P.R.*, vol. i., p. 238 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> These are preserved in a scrap-book, which I still have.

subsequently became Presidents of the Royal Society), also the president of the Section, Mr. A. R. Wallace, and the distinguished anthropologist Col. Lane Fox, who afterwards became General Pitt-Rivers. I may add that a warm letter in support of my paper was received by me from the famous astronomer who subsequently became Sir William Huggins, also a President of the Royal Society.<sup>1</sup> The main object of my paper was a plea for a scientific committee to examine the validity of the evidence that I had adduced on behalf of what appeared to be thought-transference and other supernormal phenomena, especially those relating to spiritualism. Unfortunately, in the violent dispute which followed between Carpenter and Wallace, my resolution was lost sight of.

For weeks a great controversy ensued in the *London Times*, which, like all the other newspapers (with the exception of the *Spectator*), poured ridicule upon my daring to bring such a contemptible subject before the British Association. Among other of my vigorous opponents in *The Times* were Professors Lankester and Donkin (now Sir Ray and Sir Bryan); both of these distinguished men are still living and have not abated their hostility to the subject. Here it is interesting to note that in 1876 I ventured to state in *The Times* that before we could hope to arrive at any definite conclusion as to the origin of spiritualistic phenomena, we must first ascertain whether such a thing as the transfusion of thought between sitter and medium really existed and its extent; and, secondly, whether such a thing as clairvoyance or a transcendental perceptive power had any foundation in fact? Both these questions have now been answered in the affirmative, and this renders the above caution the more necessary.

'Book tests' show that Richet's theory of cryptesthesia, which seems to be another name for clairvoyance, needs serious consideration. The critical examination of Stainton Moses' script by our member Mr. Trethewy has shown that many apparently spirit communications are transcripts

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that of the few scientific men who then had the courage to support my B.A. paper, no less than four received the Order of Merit.

of some matter which had been written or printed, it may be long ago, and, as a rule, only to be found in places inaccessible to the medium. *Nothing* seems able to elude the prying eyes of the transcendental self, whether it be incarnate or discarnate. In many sittings of to-day the same thing holds good.<sup>1</sup> For example, that excellent but illiterate medium, Sloan, of Glasgow, when in a trance state will often give details concerning a sitter whom he has never seen before and whose name even he does not know, yet in subsequent investigation many of the facts stated by the medium will be found printed, either in *Who's Who* or other books to which the medium appears to have had no possibility of access.

Hence, with these and other facts known to us, we must realize that, however trustworthy may be the *evidence* we obtain of supernormal phenomena, the *interpretation* of that evidence may in time alter—as our experience grows wider, and our knowledge of human psychology more extensive and profound. Albeit I am personally convinced that the evidence we have published decidedly demonstrates (1) the existence of a spiritual world, (2) survival after death, and (3) of occasional communications from those who have passed over.

It will be obvious that in the present paper I cannot give even an outline of the evidence that has led me to the foregoing conclusions. The so-called physical phenomena afford striking evidence of amazing supernormal power, but no proof of the survival of human personality can be derived from them. In fact, many people believe that they are simply due to the 'psychic force' of the medium and sitters; however, this is an opinion I do not share. Even the so-called 'ectoplasm,' which is seen issuing in certain cases from the body of the medium and sometimes taking human shape, may be attributed to some mysterious, unknown, and unconscious power possessed by the medium. There can be little doubt that the source of the ectoplasm is in some way derived from the human organism; but I believe

<sup>1</sup> The most amazing illustration of telesthesia, or travelling clairvoyance, I have ever known I hope to read before the S.P.R. shortly.

an unseen and intelligent supernormal agency *external* to the medium causes this ectoplasm to take definite forms and apparent vitality. I myself have not had the opportunity of ever witnessing these ectoplasmic phenomena, and therefore I defer to the opinion of such experienced and critical observers as the late Dr. Geley, Prof. Richet, and others.

#### PHYSICAL PHENOMENA.

As regards the ordinary physical phenomena I have had a long series of experiments with various mediums, going back to the time of Dr. Slade in 1876. Slade always sat with me in broad daylight, and though I have little doubt that he not unfrequently resorted to trickery, yet there was also no doubt he had genuine and remarkable mediumistic powers; his so-called exposure by Prof. Ray Lankester was quite inconclusive. Those who are interested in the matter will find in Stainton Moses's *Psychography*, pp. 104-110, a record of some of my experiments with Slade, in part quoted from the *London Times* of September 1876, and also a careful report written by my friend Mr. Conrad Cook, who accompanied me to a sitting with Slade in August 1876.

The only case of 'materialization' witnessed by me, which seemed to be inexplicable by fraud, occurred with the medium, Husk, many years ago. It may be worth while describing this experiment as it has never been published.

Mr. Wm. de Morgan had kindly lent Myers and myself his studio in Cheyne Row, an almost bare room, furnished with a small deal table about 3 feet by 5 feet, and a few chairs. After dinner Myers brought Husk to Cheyne Row in a hansom cab, and we immediately sat round the table. There were six present including the medium. William de Morgan and his sister (being sceptics), were placed in control of the medium, whose feet were tied to the legs of the table, and his hands were grasped by the sitter on each side. Mrs. de Morgan (their mother), sat facing Myers, and I sat at the other end of the

table and had control of the light. After the wrists of all present had been loosely joined together by silk thread, I blew out the candle and phenomena very soon occurred. The medium went into a trance, lights, very like fireflies, were seen darting about over our heads, movement of some objects in the room was heard, and a deep guttural voice spoke to us calling himself 'John King.' In reply to our request he said he would try and show himself. A violent convulsion of the medium occurred, and suddenly right in front of me appeared a clothed human figure from the waist upwards: the lower part of the body might have been concealed by the table. The face was illuminated by a bluish light which seemed to issue from an object held in the hand of the materialized figure. The face was undoubtedly a living one, for I saw its eyes open and close and its lips move; I asked who it was and the guttural voice said "John King." It was a dark bearded and rather unpleasant face, quite unlike that of the medium. I exclaimed, "Do you all see the figure? I am going to light the candle," and immediately risked doing so. The figure vanished the moment the match was struck, and the medium was found in deep trance, lying back in his chair and groaning: when the medium had recovered he was sent home in a cab. On comparing notes, each sitter described the face according to the different aspects it presented from his or her position at the table. We found upon experimenting that it was impossible to reproduce the figure by leaning over the table, nor could the medium have put on a mask, as his hands were held the whole time and the tying of his legs and wrists were found intact. De Morgan asked Myers and myself to come the next morning and see if we could in any way imitate what we had seen. Though de Morgan remained somewhat sceptical, Myers and I both agreed that it was extremely difficult to explain the phenomena by trickery on the part of the medium, who, moreover, was found deeply entranced a few seconds later.

With regard to the so-called 'spirit photographs,' I have been extremely sceptical of their genuineness

until quite lately. Recently, however, experiments conducted by my friend Mr. de Brath, in one of which he kindly allowed me to take part, appear to afford *indubitable* evidence of supernormal psychic photography. This conclusion confirms the opinion held by some expert and critical experimenters, who have discussed their results with me. Of course faked 'spirit photographs' abound and are easy to produce; whilst heartless rascals exist who prey upon the grief of a credulous sitter. Healthy scepticism has therefore been inevitable and wise. But we shall never arrive at any knowledge of the conditions requisite for these and other marvellous psychic phenomena, until hostile incredulity becomes no longer possible. Then, as Sir John Herschel says, "occurrences which, according to received theories *ought not* to happen, are the *facts* which serve as clues to new discoveries." <sup>1</sup>

These disputable subjects illustrate the importance of our society recognizing the fact that a difference of opinion—a *right* and a *left* wing—will necessarily have to exist among its different members. I mean that there are some who have been convinced at first hand, from their own experience, that the existence of certain psychical phenomena—especially those associated with spiritualism—admit of no doubt whatever, and are impatient with those who have not had this experience and are therefore more inclined to be cautious and even sceptical. The former class of our members wish to push forward and perhaps attach less importance to conclusive experimental evidence than they did at first: the latter class wish to go much more slowly and proceed step by step. This difference of opinion, though healthy, naturally leads to a divergence of interest in our subject, and from time to time threatens to break up the solidarity of our society.

Nor must we forget that psychical research, as stated in the original articles of our society, embraces far more than spiritistic phenomena, and I hope that our research officers will ever bear in mind the varied objects of our

<sup>1</sup> *Discourse on Natural Philosophy*, section 5.

society, which will be found printed in the first volume of our *Proceedings*.

Personally I am very anxious that earnest attention should be given to the so-called 'Reichenbach Phenomena,' wherein certain sensitives after long immersion in complete darkness perceive a luminosity emanating from the poles of a magnet and also from the human fingers. I have published in the *Philosophical Magazine*, and also in the early volumes of our *Proceedings*, the experiments which led me to the conviction that such phenomena do really occur under suitable conditions.

Another point, which I hope will sooner or later be the subject of further experiment, is the question of the old mesmeric hypothesis of 'effluence,' for which both Gurney and myself obtained what appeared to be satisfactory evidence forty years ago, and which Prof. Alrutz has in recent years confirmed.

The immediate work before us is to convince scientific authorities that various types of supernormal phenomena do *really* exist, and are capable of experimental proof. I do not think that the indifference of official science to our investigation, which has now replaced their former hostility, will be affected by an appeal to the *emotions*, such as the evidence obtained of survival after death. Science will approach the supernormal from an entirely different angle; it may possibly be pulled over the line of its present indifference by a growing recognition that telepathy does really exist. Unfortunately, the difficulty of finding suitable subjects both for telepathy and telesthesia is a great drawback. For this reason I am led to the conviction that the first movement of thought of official science in our direction will occur from the impossibility of finding any *normal* explanation of the phenomena of *dowsing*. And this subject is of all others the simplest and easiest to investigate. It has not only a wide practical importance, but it raises no religious opposition, even from the most timid of narrow-minded people. Moreover, the number of efficient dowsers can easily be ascertained and experimented with. Having devoted more than twenty years to the critical investigation of this subject, I believe that it



affords the easiest and most conclusive evidence that a supernormal perceptive power—akin to clairvoyance—exists in certain persons, of either sex, of all ages and all degrees of education.

This faculty is to be found not only in various races of men, but appears to exist, as a new and necessary sense, in many of the lower types of life. I am convinced that the mysterious migration of birds, even of very young ones, over vast tracts of land and sea, and also the *homing* instincts of many birds and animals, will be found to be akin to the dowsing faculty in man.<sup>1</sup>

#### DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PHYSICAL AND PSYCHICAL RESEARCH.

There is, of course, a fundamental difference between physical research and psychical research. The former deals with matter and energy, and the condition of the mind of the observer, whether he be sceptical or not, is of no consequence. The latter deals with the phenomena of the subconscious, and the mental attitude both of the experimenter and his subject, is of prime importance. An interesting illustration of the difference between the mental states in the two cases occurred to me some time ago. I happened to be staying in Edinburgh with that famous physicist, Professor Tait, when the news of the discovery of the telephone came to us by cable. I asked Tait what he thought of it. He replied, "It is all humbug, for such a discovery is physically impossible." When I asked him how it was that well-known men had asserted that they had heard speech transmitted a couple of miles through a wire, Tait replied it was "probably a case of the conduction of sound by long straight wires." A little later, when the telephone was shown at the British Association by Sir W. Thomson (afterwards Lord Kelvin) and experiments with it were successfully made, Tait's obstinate incredulity did not interfere with the success of the experiment. A similar instance occurred in Paris when the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Two of my little book *Creative Thought*, published by Watkins, Cecil Court, London, W.C.

Abbé Moigno, a well-known scientific writer, first showed Edison's phonograph to the Paris Academy of Sciences; the Abbé himself related to me what occurred. All the *savants* present declared, as Professor Tait did, that the reproduction of the human voice by an iron disc was physically impossible owing to the subtle wave forms produced by speech, though they admitted music might be so transmitted. The Abbé was even accused of having a ventriloquist concealed beneath the table. He left the chamber in disgust and told them to try the instrument themselves—which they did quite successfully in spite of their utter incredulity.

How different is the effect that is produced by mental environment in psychical phenomena is well known. Those experienced observers, Stainton Moses and C. C. Massey, have said, "the most unfavourable disposition to take to a medium is suspicion, and the most favourable is confidence." Sceptics may think that this is to deliver oneself over as a prey to the deceiver, and some men do certainly get taken in, but experience after a time leads them to discover their mistake. In the psychical world "faith," as Mr. Massey says, "is a condition of obtaining evidence, the key to the gate of the invisible world." By faith Massey means that a *sympathetic* state of mind establishes a rapport between the observer and the medium. The fact that we need no sympathy with our instruments, when testing a physical or chemical discovery, naturally leads the physicist or chemist to a state of scornful amusement, when told that his own attitude of mind is of importance in psychical research. But it appears to be a fact that even if at the back of our minds we entertain feelings of prejudice and hostility, we can hope for little success in psychic enquiry, however much we may disclaim the feeling of hostility. This, of course, does not mean an attitude of credulity or any relaxation of careful and critical observation.

All psychical researchers need to bear in mind that every sensitive or medium is a *suggestible subject*; if you go expecting fraud you may possibly create the very fraud you suspect. If you make preparations beforehand to lay

a trap for the medium, it is probable that both medium and experimenter will fall into the trap.

There is another aspect of our enquiry, known to most of us—that is, that psychical phenomena largely depend upon involuntary and not voluntary effort, upon the sub-conscious and not the conscious self. Even in the simple phenomena of telepathy it is the subliminal self that is operative. Further, I believe that the common practice of experimenters *energetically willing* the idea to be thought of, is of no value, and may indeed be detrimental to success. In the early experiments which Myers, Gurney, and myself conducted with the Creery children at Buxton we found that the best results occurred when no strenuous efforts were made. In fact, when we made the experiments as amusing as possible, we had the greatest success, though every precaution was taken to prevent collusion or signalling.

Another fact which seems to me brought out very clearly in our experiments is that psychical phenomena, whether of telepathy, clairvoyance, or the higher phenomena of spiritualism, are manifestations of, or through, the *transcendental self* of the subject, and are therefore independent of the fundamental units of the physical world—matter, time, and space. It is true that, in the case of telepathy, the mental response of the percipient to the idea in the agent's mind, naturally suggests the physical analogue of the resonance of a silent tuning-fork to a sounding one which is in perfect unison with it. Indeed, I was inclined at first to think that telepathy was somewhat similar to this—that it was a *nervous induction* across space, analogous to the well-known facts of electric and magnetic induction. But whilst telepathy has been made more conceivable, and more credible to the public generally, by the discovery and use of wireless telephony, we must remember that the two phenomena are wholly different. One belongs to the *physical* order, the other to the *psychical* order. The laws regulating the transmission of energy across space apply to the one, but not to the other. Immense effort is necessary to transmit a wireless message across the Atlantic, but apparently no effort at all is required to transmit a

telepathic impact, of which we have instances, from New Zealand to London. On the contrary, a *passive* condition of both transmitter and receiver in telepathy seems essential, so far at least as their consciousness is concerned.

The word 'thought-transference' is apt to be misleading, as it seems to suggest a transmission of ideas between two persons across material space; but, as I said, space does not seem to enter into the question at all. Here it may be interesting to note that in the first publication of the discovery of this super-sensuous faculty, I called it not 'thought-transference,' but the *transfusion of thought*.<sup>1</sup> We are now coming back to this idea, for telepathy is probably the intermingling of our transcendental selves or souls. The common and grossly materialistic conception of the soul is that it is limited to the confines and contour of the body. This is surely an erroneous conception if, as we believe, the soul is an *immaterial* entity, not simply a function of the brain. For all we know to the contrary, the human soul may spread through a vast orbit around the body, and may intermingle with other incarnate or discarnate souls. Tennyson speaks of a dream condition, "when the mortal limit of the self was loosed, and past into the Nameless, as the cloud melts into Heaven." Moreover the intimacy and immediacy of the union between the soul and God is the fundamental idea, not only of the New Testament, but of all great Christian thinkers.

#### CONCLUSION.

As evidence of the great value which some eminent men attached to our investigations at their very outset, I will only quote from a couple of letters which I received more than forty years ago. That distinguished scientific man of the last generation, Dr. Angus Smith, F.R.S., writing to me in 1876, on the theoretic importance of thought-transference, remarked that "the indications now obtained point

<sup>1</sup> See *Proceedings, S.P.R.*, vol. i., p. 48, where will be found an extract from a letter of mine to *The Times* dated Sept. 1876.

to some mighty truth more decidedly than even the aberrations of Uranus to the newest of the great planets. If we could prove the action of mind at a distance by constant experiments it would be a discovery that would make all other discoveries seem trifles." This was also the view of that eminent biologist, Mr. G. J. Romanes, F.R.S., who, when writing to me on the same subject in 1881, remarked "if the alleged phenomena are true I hold it to be unquestionable that they would be of more importance than any other in the science and philosophy of our time."

Quite recently our former President, Professor W. M'Dougall, F.R.S., in his presidential address to the American S.P.R. speaks of psychical research as the most hopeful barrier against the oncoming tide of materialism, and he remarks that "a civilization which resigns itself wholly to materialism lives upon and consumes its moral capital and is incapable of renewing it. . . . Unless psychical research can discover facts incompatible with materialism, materialism will continue to spread; no other power can stop it, both revealed religion and metaphysical philosophy are equally helpless before the advancing tide." As regards religion being helpless, I cannot, however, go as far as M'Dougall.

Richet's point of view, which is purely materialistic, appears at first to contradict M'Dougall's remarks. We know that Richet, with splendid courage and loyalty to truth, has avowed his belief in the most incredible psychical phenomena, some of which even we may perhaps hesitate to accept. But Richet's philosophy compels him to reject the spiritualistic hypothesis and to explain everything by a modified psychic force theory; a theory which was once accepted by Crookes but subsequently rejected by him. Richet attributes all the subjective phenomena of psychical research to 'cryptesthesia,' and some of the objective to 'pragmatic cryptesthesia.'<sup>1</sup> But these polysyllables do not

<sup>1</sup> Richet uses this term instead of psychometry (soul measurement), which he rightly says is so detestable a word that he proposes to call it "pragmatic cryptesthesia, i.e. cryptesthesia by means of material objects."

help us any more than the names given by some learned psychologists who tell us that all psychical phenomena are simply illustrations of the "exteriorised effects of unconscious complexes!" One is reminded by this formidable nomenclature of the numerous and recondite hypotheses by which Ptolemaic astronomers tried to make their observations square with the geocentric theory of the universe. To the plain man it seems simpler, less improbable and more in accordance with facts, for biologists to recognise—what astronomers long since have done—that the universe after all is *not* explicable from the restricted view-point either of the earth or of the brain. Nevertheless, Richet's views will doubtless form the half-way house of many *savants* who hold mechanistic theories of the universe. However, I venture to predict that neither they nor Richet will remain many years in that convenient but anomalous resting-place.

Sooner or later psychical research will demonstrate to the educated world, not only the existence of a *soul in man*, but also the existence of a *soul in Nature*. Our biologists have hitherto been so largely wedded to materialistic views that they have overlooked the vast importance of the psychic factor in evolution. The recognition of such a purposive and a pervasive factor, running throughout the whole realm of nature, will be found necessary to invoke in order to explain many biological phenomena that now receive very inadequate solution from current theories. Long ago Lord Kelvin said, "Overpoweringly strong proofs exist of intelligence and benevolent design in Nature."

At the present day, when the very foundations of religion appear to be shaken, and men are deserting the faith of their fathers, and the whole civilised world is becoming more and more materialistic in its views, it is evident that psychical research will ere long be regarded, by all thoughtful men, as the most valuable handmaid to religion. Scarcely a week passes without my receiving letters or visits from perplexed men, both among the clergy and laity, who have found their religious creeds crumbling beneath their feet, and want to know what help they

might obtain from psychical research. Mr. Gladstone's opinion on this subject is well known and often quoted; and Frederic Myers, as we know, has eloquently expressed his views. In his *Human Personality* again and again he returns to this aspect of the subject, and in his last chapter remarks, "We do not seek to shape the clauses of the great Act of Faith, but merely to prove its *preamble*. . . . To be able to say to the theologian or philosopher: 'Thus and thus we demonstrate that a spiritual world exists—a world of independent and abiding realities, not a mere epi-phenomenon or transitory effect of the material world—but a world of *things*, concrete and living, not a mere system of abstract ideas' . . . "; and he adds, "This would indeed, in my view, be the weightiest service that *any* research could render to the deep disquiet of our time—to the world-old, and world-wide, desire"<sup>1</sup> of mankind.

<sup>1</sup> *Human Personality*, vol. ii., p. 297.